



Do you believe the police department should be investigating more “serious” crime? If so, then you need to learn to separate the myths from the facts about teenage drinking.

It Could Save Your Child's Life

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- 1** **Myth:** It's not hurting anyone.
Fact: Alcohol is the number one killer of teenagers.

In the year 2000, with increased population estimates, 770 more young people will die in motor vehicle crashes than 1993, if the fatality rate remains constant. Over 40 percent of the deaths for people age 15-20 result from motor vehicle crashes. Two out of five motor vehicle fatalities involve alcohol. Approximately 10,000 young people age 16-24 are killed each year in alcohol-related accidents, including drowning, suicides, violent injuries, homicides, and injuries from fire.

- 2** **Myth:** Teenage alcohol use has not changed much over the years.
Fact: Things are much worse today.

Comparing your child's drinking with adult drinking, or even teen drinking 20 years ago, is a

serious mistake. Today, 50% of our sixth graders feel pressure to drink alcohol. The average age of first alcohol use is 12 years old, and it is not uncommon to find 10-year-old alcoholics. Most young people who get caught for an alcohol-related offense are regular drinkers. It is not their first experience.

- 3** **Myth:** It's only beer.
Fact: Alcohol is a drug, too.

Alcohol has been called the most active drug affecting the human body, impairing the intellect, physical abilities and metabolism. The chemical reaction of alcohol on the nervous system is similar to that of ether. Ethyl alcohol (ethanol)- the substance in beer, wine, and whiskey which produces intoxication- is a drug in the same chemical class as tranquilizers and barbituates.

- 4** **Myth:** It's just a harmless phase.
Fact: Alcohol impairs performance and retards development.

Use of alcohol decreases concentration, attention and memory retention, contributing to a loss of achievement and goal orientation. Alcohol use by teenagers impedes the development of a wide range of skills and competencies needed for developing self-confidence, for maintaining healthy relationships and for fulfilling potential. Academic achievement declines as the regularity and intensity of alcohol and other drug use increases. A study of college students found that decreased thinking and reasoning performance on various tests was associated with increased quantity of alcohol per drinking occasion and total lifetime consumption.

- 5** **Myth:** Booze will keep them off harder drugs.
Fact: Alcohol is often the gateway to other drug use.

Early use of alcohol is associated with greater involvement in other drug use and with more frequent use of alcohol. There is a strong association between the use of alcohol and the use of marijuana. Sixty-three percent of young heavy drinkers reported using marijuana during the previous month, while only 4% of those who abstain from using alcohol smoked pot. The extent of marijuana use rises with increases in drinking levels by youth. Heavy marijuana smokers are 75% more likely than non-smokers to try cocaine.

- 6** **Myth:** There is no difference between teens and adults, and I would be a hypocrite to tell my child to abstain.
Fact: Teenagers are more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol.

The average alcoholic-prone adult takes 10 to 30 years to progress from the first drink to out-of-control alcoholism. Teenagers walk the same road from the first drink to alcoholism in three to six months. Regular drinking causes kids to give up sports, hobbies, and later, productive work at school—resulting in guilt and a declining sense of self worth. The use of alcohol suppresses inhibitions and judgments, permitting young people to cross the line of sexual involvement at younger and younger ages. Forty-seven percent of teenagers surveyed in 1982 were intoxicated the first time they engaged in sexual intercourse.

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Myth: My child can drink responsibly.

Fact: Teenage drinking is against the law.

Just as there is no such thing as a responsible shoplifter, burglar or murderer, there is no such thing as a responsible underage drinker. The 21 drinking age is the result of an overwhelming consensus of the citizens of Pennsylvania. It is illegal in Pennsylvania for anyone under 21 to purchase, possess, consume or transport alcohol. This includes: minors taking a sip of beer; buying beer for a party; even delivering a six pack to a relative. Anyone under age 21 will lose his or her license for 90 days and face up to \$300 in fines for transporting alcohol, possessing alcohol, drinking alcohol, having a false identification card or lying about one's age to buy alcohol. This law applies even if the minor is at a party far from any vehicle. On a second offense, a one-year license suspension applies; two years for a third offense. By law, the police must notify the parents of minors arrested for certain underage alcohol offenses. An adult, even a parent, who is caught supplying alcohol to someone under age 21 will be fined \$1,000 (\$2,500 for a second offense). That person could also be liable for any resulting injuries and/or property damage.

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For more information, please contact:

**National Clearinghouse for Alcohol
and Drug Information**

P.O. Box 2345

Rockville, MD 20847-2345

1-800-729-6686

www.health.org

**Drug Abuse Information and
Treatment Referral Hotline**

1-800-662-HELP



Check out our website:
www.attorneygeneral.gov

*What Every Parent Should
Know About. . .*

TEENAGE ALCOHOL ABUSE



*Provided by the Office of
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